[P. 375, B]

RITUAL ACTIVITIES

843
[845]

A pregnant woman was not permitted to eat eggs with double yolks, or double fruit, lest she have twins. No special action was taken if twins were born, however.

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During her confinement a woman was not supposed to rub the sweat from her face. She might dab the sweat off, but to rub it would cause her to be wrinkled in her old age. One informant assured me that this was the truth and pointed to her own relatively unwrinkled face as proof.

852

When a child loses a milk tooth, it is taken up and thrown into the brush. At that time an admonition is shouted to "some little animal with sharp teeth," that it should exchange the milk tooth for a good permanent one (2295a-2301)

PUBERTY: GIRLS
(2305-2352)

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[178]

Aside from the "big times" which will be described later, the girls' puberty dance was the most important ceremonial gathering among the Washo. This custom has survived with tenacity and it is still considered a matter of real concern if for some reason a girl does not have "her dance."

Although much of the activity at a girls' dance is clearly social throughout the occasion, there is a series of ritual actions which must be carried out. The following account is an idealized version of the "old way." Other accounts will describe variations which have developed in the past years.

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[178]

Certain statements which I make will appear to be at variance with Stewart's Culture Element Distribution Lists. However, I am inclined to think that the absence of traits in the memory of my own informants represents a pattern of change rather than inaccuracies on the part of earlier investigators. With minor exceptions, differences between statements made today and Stewart's lists take the form of traits marked present in the lists which are unknown to my own informants. Moreover, most of these differences are to be found in the hair-combing and scratching complex and suggest that the taboos on hair combing were abandoned some time between the childhood of his informants, who were in their seventies in 1936, and that of my own informants, who are in their seventies today (1959).

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The parents of my informants must not have known or not enforced combing taboos, while the parents of Stewart's informants must have considered them proper and so instructed their children. We can speculate, on this basis, that the taboo on hair combing and scratching was abandoned by the Washo some time in the first half of the century. Whether this can be credited to the influence of the white man or to a continuing pattern of change is a matter for further investigation.

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[115]

The account of the entire puberty complex which follows was given to me by a seventy-five-year-old Washo woman who is generally consulted whenever a family plans to hold the girls' dance.

"When a girl is about ten she is told what is going to happen to her. When her first period comes [she is not specially confined] people tell her to be

844 [842]

would come to the mother. Or if it were turned over, her wish, either for more children or for none, would be thwarted. The place where the placenta was buried was remembered so it might be turned at any time the woman may change her mind.

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As the placenta was associated with the life of the mother, so the piece of the umbilical cord that fell from the child was associated with the life of the child. This piece of the cord was carefully preserved until a convenient opportunity arose for disposing of it according to custom. The cord of a girl[3] was finally placed in a hole bored in the root of a living sunflower (su·gil). Care was taken that the cord was straight so the child would not have a crooked back. The cord of a boy was placed in the cavity of a short length of the femur of a deer and hung perpendicular from a tree. Stewart's (1941) informants said that the cord was placed on the infant's cradle, and Clara Frank agrees with this. [824] [826]

While the mother was being delivered of her child, the father had to stay away. He could not sit in the doorway of the house, or the baby would not be born easily. As soon as the father heard of the child's birth he took a bath in a nearby stream. Stewart (1941) reported that the bath was given to him by another man, that he ran before the bath, and that the father was forbidden meat, fat and salt during the wife's confinement. Lowie (1939, 305) wrote that "The husband shared his wife's fast only for the first two or three days after the birth, being subsequently free to eat anything." Gambling was also forbidden the father during this period. [844] [525]

A present of a buckskin or other clothes was given by the father to another man after the birth of his child. At the end of the observances he gave away his old clothes, bathed, painted himself red, went hunting, and gave away his first kill. Throughout the confinement the father supplied the wood for the fire. [431]

844 178 [431] [777]

In recent times, both baby and mother were bathed the first morning after the baby's birth. The mother cut a small tuft of her own and her baby's hair and gave a small present of dress goods, a handkerchief, or money to any of the women present. This helped to bring good luck. The month of meat taboo is still observed by the more conservative Washo. 846

[759] [302]

The mother used to stay in bed for a long time. She was massaged with a salve (do·ša?) and had red ocher (sawšan) applied to her body. She was instructed not to get up too quickly, and she would exercise a little each day. She would have her hair trimmed on the day of the baby feast (ńšwnan ?ēmluhaya?).[4]

3. Wyethia mollis Gray, according to Juanita Schubert personal communication

4. Literally "she (or they) feed the baby," acc. to William H. Jacobsen, Jr., pers. communication

14:Stewart E-5 (1936-1938)1944 NR13 Northern Paiute NR13
Washo NT20

interrogated, resisters refused to mention these previous illnesses. Opposition to peyotism is comparable to most Indians' attitude toward government hospitals.[a]

Five informants condemn peyotism because of its unsanitary ritual, citing the chewing of peyote buttons by the chief for others to swallow, the drinking of blackened water from the drum, and the use of a common spoon for the ritualistic breakfast. Two maintain peyote turns the skin black; another insists it dries the blood. Only six believe peyotism is bad because it keeps patients from proper hospital treatment, whereas twenty are certain peyote is unnecessary because shamans cure better. Three of these latter are former peyotists, treated by shamans after unsuccessfully using peyote.

Other arguments for supporting peyotism have a religious basis. Five members said they joined because it was a satisfying way to worship "the one true God," at least four being active in both Protestant and peyote meetings.[b] Peyote visions of dead relatives in a happy state, of God and Jesus welcoming the Indians in a beautiful land, of witches frustrated, of the creation of the earth and all living things are proof that peyotism is the true Indian religion. Bright fields, kaleidoscopic colors, attractive nude women, and many other types of delusions are pleasurable experiences, but in most hallucinations the Indians find divine instruction.[c] For three or four members, these revelations constitute the principal appeal, whereas most consider them incidental, and seven report seeing nothing, even after eating twenty-four buttons. Visions reveal peyote's power, but only Henry Jack believes they impart individual power. All consider peyote a great teacher and already new peyote songs have been received by three. Visions are merely part of the religious aspect of the cult.[d]

For several Washo-Paiute cultists, peyote protects from witchcraft, a function also attributed to the cactus by the Taos Indians and emphasized by the Mescalero as peyote's principal virtue.[e] Some Washo-Paiute also carry "chief peyotes" as fetishes, such as is commonly done in the Plains.[f]

Among the opponents, only half a dozen Indians fight peyotism on religious grounds, and they stress other reasons. Their arguments are of three types: First, peyotism is not really a religion at all. In denying that peyotism is a religion, resisters accuse Ben Lancaster of praying, quoting the Bible, and making moral speeches only to attract Indians to be robbed or raped.[g] The Christian missionaries, of course, attack peyote on religious grounds and provide arguments for their followers. Second, aboriginal religion is better. Preference for aboriginal religion is implicit in preference for shamanism; shaman Blind Mike (W,2) said his personal guardian spirit warned him against peyote and protected him during the one meeting he visited. Third, Indians lose missionary gifts. Hank Pete (W,2) condemns

[a] U. S. Senate Hearings, 1932, 15131–15141, 15202.

[b] Joe Green and Johnny Cleveland were invited to speak at a conference of Nevada missionaries at Reno, October, 1938. The Rev. Mr. Dunlap affirmed that neither ever believed in peyote or used it.

[c] Petrullo writes, ". . . a prime law of peyotism is that Peyote is the teacher of Religion."

[d] My data are in accord with Schulte's' view (1938: 712) concerning the Plains: "The peyote vision is incidental and of little significance," and in contrast to Shonle's thesis (p. 59) that "the underlying belief in the supernatural origin of visions is important among the factors contributing to the diffusion of peyote and in a general way defines the area of its probable spread," and to La Barre's (p. 58) that, "though infrequently expressed as an official motive, the vision-producing physiological effect of peyote is probably the major reason."

[e] Parsons, 67–68; Opler, 1937; La Barre, 72, 97–98.

[f] La Barre, 72.

[g] Ethnologists have often said that Christian elements in peyotism were recently added in order to make the cult less objectionable to white men. La Barre (43, fn. 85) states: "In the Plains peyotism largely followed the Ghost Dance frustration of anti-white sentiment and preached conciliation instead; such Christian elements as were added had a largely propagandist function in that direction."